DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 464 726 PS 030 337

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TITLE The Culture of the Elementary School as a Function of Leadership Style and Disciplinary Climate and Culture.
PUB DATE 2002-04-04
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 1-5, 2002).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Techniques; *Discipline; *Educational Environment; *Elementary Education; Elementary School Teachers; *Leadership Styles; Predictor Variables; Principals; *School Culture
IDENTIFIERS *Administrative Flexibility

ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of elementary school leadership upon the disciplinary climate and culture of the school. Participating in the study were 680 faculty and 30 principals from 30 rural, suburban, and urban/inner-city elementary schools, selected at random from northeastern Pennsylvania. The sample included regular education teaching faculty, teachers of special subject areas, and the school administrators. Principals completed the Leader Behavior Analysis II, and faculty completed the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire. Primary findings from the multiple regression analysis supported a direct relationship between a school's disciplinary climate and culture and the flexibility of its leadership. Flexibility was more critical than the leadership style variable of effectiveness, which yielded a moderate, but significant, coefficient. Significant partial correlations were found between the predictors disengagement, production emphasis, thrust, and consideration and style flexibility. There were modest, but significant, Beta weights for leadership style effectiveness and the climate variables of hindrance, aloofness, production emphasis, and consideration. (KB)

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ED 464 726

The Culture of the Elementary School as a Function of Leadership Style and Disciplinary Climate and Culture

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A Paper Presented
At the American Educational Research Association
Annual Convention 2002

PS 030337

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The Culture of the Elementary School
as a Function of Leadership Style and Disciplinary Climate

The elementary school represents the first public school experience for most children. As students enter the elementary setting, they are exposed to an organized set of regulations and procedures that will set the tone for their ensuing formal education. The regulations in place within the building and its environs when coupled with the leadership of the elementary school are the primary factors in setting the climate of the school.

These variables of school climate and culture, discipline, and leadership represent important influences on the success or failure which students may experience. This study examined the effects of elementary school leadership upon the disciplinary climate and culture of the school. Specifically, this studied focused on the relationship of leadership style as measured by the Leader Behavior Analysis II (LBA II) and the disciplinary climate and culture of elementary schools as perceived by elementary school faculties. Faculty perceptions were measured as scale scores on the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ).

The research population was comprised of faculty and professional staff from 30 rural, suburban, and urban/inner-city elementary school, selected at random from Northeastern Pennsylvania. The sample included regular education teaching faculty, as well as teachers of special subject areas including Music, Art, Physical Education, Library, Learning Support, Gifted Education, Reading, and Speech Specialization, Guidance, and School Nursing. Further, the study included the 30 administrators of those elementary schools. Altogether, these schools represented 19 public school districts. The schools included in this study were highly representative of the schools in this region in that they were

located in three distinct geographic areas-rural, suburban, urban/inner-city serving students from all socio-economic backgrounds.

The professional faculties of the 30 elementary schools completed the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ) by Halpin and Croft (1963). Additionally, the principals of the same 30 schools completed the Leader Behavior Analysis II (LBA II) by Kenneth Blanchard and his associates (Blanchard Training and Development, Inc., 1994. Used herein with permission by R. Andrews, Dir. of Intellectual Properties). The grand mean scores of the eight sub-tests of the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ) for the 30 schools and the grand mean Effectiveness and Flexibility scores from the Leader Behavior Analysis II (LBA II) were subjected to a multiple regression analysis. There are a total of 713 teachers who are employed in these schools. All respondents were volunteers to whom assurances were given of their anonymity. The final sample consisted of 680 subjects, approximately 95.3% of the available population. All of the 30 principals completed the Leader Behavior Analysis II (LBA II).

Primary findings support a direct relationship between a school's disciplinary climate and culture and, most pointedly, the flexibility of its leadership. The correlation between the eight climate variables and the leadership style flexibility variable yielded a significant multiple correlational coefficient, R=. 585 supporting the relationship and subsequent impact of leaders flexibility. This variable was clearly more critical than the leadership style variable of effectiveness which yielded a moderate, but significant coefficient, R=. 286.

When correlated with the leadership style variable flexibility, the corresponding Beta weights for the climate variables disengagement, production emphasis, thrust, and consideration yielded results which indicate significant partial correlations exist between these predictors and Flexibility. These climate variables represent the personal management aspect of educational leadership. That is to say, when these four variables were correlated with style flexibility, the large Beta weights on the climate variables of disengagement, production emphasis, thrust, and consideration are significant and speak to an underlining explanation.

The review of the literature for this study demonstrated that a major rationale for the educational system as we know it is to provide children with the knowledge to ensure the successful financial and social perpetuation of our society (Short, Short, & Blanton, 1994). Brophy (1999) continues that a learning environment that is considered to be most successful and conducive to the acquisition of knowledge reveals a sense of organization, planning, scheduling, and most importantly, understanding. Brophy continues to assert that if students possess the beliefs that their formal educational program is non-productive then they lose nothing through the enactment of disruptive behaviors. From the adult perspective, if faculty members perceive themselves as spending a disproportional amount of time dealing with disciplinary issues within their classrooms, their production emphasis will be focused on non-academic, behavioral problems. As more instructional time is spent on disciplinary issues, faculty disengagement increases. One cause for this is the lack of leader's perceived ability to motivate the school community through personal disciplinary modeling. Ultimately, the perception of the faculty member of the leader is one non-consideration regarding her requests for support

and understanding of classroom programming. Thus, the high Beta loading of the variable "consideration" supports the ideology that flexible leaders have, and demonstrate consideration for all learning community members.

The second question addressed by this study examines the relationship between disciplinary climate and culture and perceived leader support within the elementary setting as measured by the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ) and the Leader Behavior Analysis II (LBA II). Major (1990) posits that "discipline should be given as high a priority in our curriculum as we now give reading, writing, and arithmetic" (p.9). The significant findings of this analysis were that without directive, collaborative, visionary leadership that nurtures a unified, consistent disciplinary climate and culture, the learning community members cannot be expected to support a learning environment conducive to meeting the diverse academic and behavioral needs of elementary students.

Once again, the multiple regression analysis of the leadership style variables yielded modest but significant Beta weights for leadership style Effectiveness and the climate variables of hindrance, aloofness, production emphasis, and consideration. The multiple correlation was R=.286. An interpretation of the criterion variables upon this dependent variable indicated that when faculty members perceive a lack of support by the leader the task of conducting an appropriate instructional program to students is hindered and therefore, not considered functional or fruitful. Therefore, the multiple Pearson correlation coefficient with leader effectiveness as the dependent variable yielded a less significant than the variable of flexibility with the climate variables of disengagement, production emphasis, thrust, and consideration.

Murphy (1998) argues the need for the flow of authority to be less hierarchical with more flexibility leading away from the organizational infrastructure and more towards the development of human resources. Thus, the third question of this study sought quantifiable evidence of a leadership aspect that best enhances the learning community. The data analysis clearly articulates that the style attribute of flexibility can and does contribute to leadership effectiveness. Through multiple regression analysis, quantifiable evidence supports flexible, situational style of leadership.

It is this major variable of flexibility that allows the organizational leader to assess the learning organization from a personalized, individual basis rather than simply from past experience. Thus, information gleaned from this study of leadership style and its relationship to climate factors allow the educator to be more fully aware of what is occurring instructionally, behaviorally, and socially within and among learning community members. Duke (1998) agrees that leaders may clearly state their leadership claims upon the organization, but ultimately, leadership is socially created, constructed and imparted.

These correlations of faculty and administrator perceptions are significant in that they provide practitioners a better understanding of how to create and sustain a learning environment conducive to the development of positive, productive, functional teaching and learning. Additionally, it suggests a need to promote opportunities for direct collaboration between faculty and leadership. Therefore, a clearer understanding as to the goals and vision for the learning community will be developed and consistently patterned.

This study has contributed to the literature by emphasizing the relationship between three important variables of everyday school life: 1) leadership; 2) discipline; and 3) culture and climate. Information gained from the study of these areas allow both the administration and the classroom and special subject area teachers to enhance awareness and responsibility for the positive and fruitful implementation of the instructional program. To provide the student population with the knowledge and skills necessary to become functional and successful members of the learning community, administrators and staff must work in conjunction to create a learning environment that communicates concern for the growth of all constituents. As the cultural match between school leadership and faculty members is displayed through modeling of instructional behavioral agenda items, the learning community becomes unified and successful academic objectives may be met.

The correlation of faculty and administrator perceptions is significant as it provides practitioners with a better understanding of how to create and sustain a learning environment which is conducive to the development of positive, productive, functional teaching and learning. Additionally, it will allow opportunities for direct collaboration between faculty and leadership. Therefore, a clearer understanding as to the goals and vision for the learning community will be developed and consistently patterned. The implications for the faculty and administrators are for greater cultural integration which may be founded and supported by the district superintendent. The indoctrination of newly appointed school principals to the existing climate and culture they will be working with will provide a foundational understanding that will lend itself to the alignment of the new leader's vision for the learning organization. The ideologies and perceptions of the

current faculty and staff, the vision of the new school leader, and the strategic plan of the central administration combine to create the major components of a successful learning organization.

Throughout the administrator's tenure, opportunities for ongoing administrative in-service may be offered by the central administration to address and support situational leadership issues and learning community involvement regarding disciplinary culture and climate. School leaders from within the district need opportunities to share and discuss activities for cultural development and expansion within their buildings. Ergo, regularly scheduled in-service opportunities for building leaders must be offered to focus on climate and culture issues and their relationship to the organization's disciplinary structure.

District policies regarding ongoing support and education for building administrators may be designated by the governing board of School Directors. The provision of district policies regarding the understanding displays a linkage of long range strategic initiatives beginning from the local School Board to central administration to the constituency of the schools.

The selection of school administrators has become a learning community decision. Candidates for school ad ministerial positions are often interviewed by committees including central administration, school administration, teachers, students, and parents. This large group of interviewers expresses the attitudes and expectations of the entire learning community in the selection of a principal who will represent the appropriate managerial match for their school. This interest represents collaborative efforts between all facets of the learning community. Further studies might explore the involvement of

community relations within the relationship leadership and disciplinary climate and culture.

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